



# Medical Examiner Department Business Plan

**Fiscal Years: 2022 and 2023\***

(10/1/2021 through 9/30/2023)

Approved by:

A blue ink signature of Kenneth D. Hutchins, written in a cursive style.

Kenneth D. Hutchins M.D.  
Department Director

2-9-2022

Date

A blue ink signature of J.D. Patterson, written in a cursive style.

J.D. Patterson  
Chief Public Safety Officer

02/09/22

Date

Plan Date: **February 8, 2022**





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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW</b>	<b>Page 2</b>
Departmental Mission	
Table of Organization	
Our Customer	
Strategic Alignment Summary	
<b>KEY ISSUES</b>	<b>Page 8</b>
<b>PRIORITY INITIATIVES</b>	<b>Page 9</b>
<b>FUTURE OUTLOOK</b>	<b>Page 10</b>
<b>ATTACHMENT 1</b>	<b>Page 11</b>
<b>BUSINESS PLAN REPORT</b>	





## DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

### Department Mission

The mission of the Medical Examiner Department is to provide accurate, timely, dignified, compassionate and professional death investigative services for the residents of Miami-Dade County, together with education, consultation and research for local and national medical, legal, academic and law enforcement communities.

The Medical Examiner Department exists to provide statutorily mandated medicolegal death investigative services for the residents of Miami-Dade County. The work of the department focuses on what is generally termed "forensic pathology." This field of work combines the efforts of legal and law enforcement investigations with those of medicine and science to ascertain the facts surrounding deaths, particularly the cause and manner of death, as defined in Florida Statute, Chapter 406. This mandate translates into a workload of investigating nearly 15,000 deaths annually. Forensic medical and toxicological consultation services, education, and research further define the department's mission. Apart from our core mission, the department directs the County's Indigent Cremation Services (ICS). The County's Indigent Cremation Services provide low-cost disposition for abandoned, unclaimed human remains and for deceased members of indigent Miami-Dade County families.

The department interrelates with many local, state and federal agencies, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), State Attorney's and Public Defender's Offices, Life Alliance Organ Procurement, Legacy Donor Services Foundation, Florida Lions Eye Bank, law enforcement agencies, medical offices and hospitals, funeral homes, and the media. The Medical Examiner Department currently has eighty-nine (89) full-time employees in its various bureaus, which include: the Director's Office, Pathology/Histology, Toxicology, and Operations. Within Operations are: the Budget and Finances Office, Information Technology, Human Resources, Procurement, Records, Morgue, Photography, Investigations, Evidence Recovery and Indigent Cremation Services.





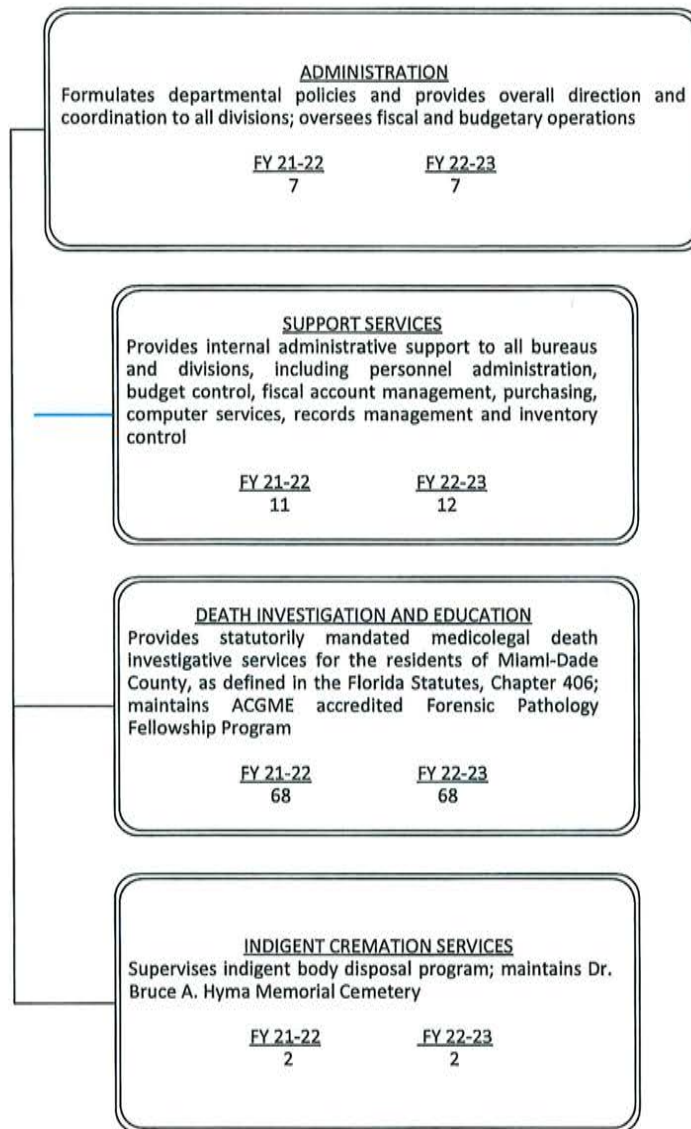


## Departmental Business Plan and Outlook

Department Name: **Medical Examiner**

FY2021-22 & FY2022-23

### Table of Organization



The FY 2022-23 total number of full-time equivalent positions is 89





## Departmental Business Plan and Outlook

Department Name: **Medical Examiner**

FY2021-22 & FY2022-23

### Our Customer

The Miami-Dade Medical Examiner Department (ME) provides statutorily mandated medicolegal death investigative services for County residents. In cooperation with various local law enforcement agencies, the department uses the tools of medicine and science to ascertain the facts surrounding deaths in order to determine the cause and manner of death as defined in Florida Statute, Chapter 406.

The specialized nature of the Medical Examiner Department's work guarantees a restricted and specialized customer/market base. Since death is not bound by social, economic, political or legal parameters, the Department serves a diverse group of customers with various expectations.

For the most part, our customers are drawn to us by virtue of the decedents who are brought to our facility for investigation and certification. The most personal services are those provided to bereaved next-of-kin who call and visit the Department daily to seek information and assistance. Each decedent draws an investigating police agency contingent on the jurisdiction in which the death occurs, and each decedent will be followed by family members. As a government agency established by state statute and funded by public dollars, we have a clearly defined customer base:

Customers	Needs
Bereaved families	Prompt release of remains, sensitivity, professionalism
Funeral homes	Prompt release of remains; clear, accurate death certificate
Law enforcement	Prompt response to crime scenes, professional cooperation
Judicial system	Accurate death investigative information
Private Industry and Media	Prompt release of public records information
Federal, State and County Governments	Adherence to County ordinances, rules, regulations and directives
Hospitals, nursing homes, and assisted living facilities	Prompt response, professional cooperation

Each year, the Department hosts forensic seminars, such as the Medicolegal Death Investigation and the International Forensic Photography Workshops. These seminars draw professionals and students from across the country and abroad.

Every three years, the Florida Medical Examiner Commission conducts customer satisfaction surveys of all the customers listed above and provides feedback to the Chief Medical Examiner.

The area of forensic toxicology services is a competitive environment with private and public sectors competing for contracts. The department's Toxicology Laboratory provides quality laboratory services for other Medical Examiner jurisdictions and has been successful in retaining these business partners year after year. A key factor in this retention of business is the fact that the ME services have been competitive with the private sector. Maintaining a competitive edge has been challenged by the rising costs of helium and petroleum-based





## **Departmental Business Plan and Outlook**

**Department Name: Medical Examiner**

**FY2021-22 & FY2022-23**

products as well as the inherent personnel and operational limitations of the toxicology laboratory.

The Department serves the residents of Miami-Dade County, many local, state and federal agencies, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), State Attorney's and Public Defender's Offices, Life Alliance Organ Procurement, Legacy Donor Services Foundation, Florida Lions Eye Bank, insurance companies, private not-for-profit organizations, law enforcement departments, medical offices, hospitals, funeral homes, and the media.







## Departmental Business Plan and Outlook

Department Name: **Medical Examiner**

FY2021-22 & FY2022-23

### Strategic Alignment Summary

- I. The Department's mission aligns with the following Miami-Dade County Strategic Plan Goals:
  1. Safe Community for all (PS1)
  2. Reductions in Preventable Death, Injury and Property Loss (PS2)
  3. Effective Emergency and Disaster Management (PS3)
  4. Excellent, engaged, and resilient workforce (GG2)
  5. Optimal internal Miami-Dade County operations and service delivery (GG3)
  6. Effective Leadership and Management Practices (GG4)
  7. Safe, healthy, and attractive neighborhoods and communities (NI1)







## Departmental Business Plan and Outlook

Department Name: **Medical Examiner**

FY2021-22 & FY2022-23

### Strategic Alignment Summary

Select Department-related Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives with related departmental Programs & Initiatives:

CODE	STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS AND OBJECTIVES	DEPARTMENTAL PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES
<b>PS1</b>	<b>Safe Community for all</b>	
<b>PS1-2</b>	Solve crimes quickly, accurately and in a fair manner	Maintain timely evidence collection and investigative services, completion of autopsy protocols and pending cases, toxicological and histopathological analysis as well as body disposition approvals in accordance with the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) accreditation.
		Review and process the County's unidentified decedents through the Federal DNA Initiative National Crime Information Center (NCIC) and National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs.org).
		Provide quality, relevant and professional training programs.
		Maintain death scene investigative services by certified medicolegal death investigators and medical examiners.
		Continue to repair and/or recapitalize aging equipment to ensure a timely, accurate and consistent level of quality service to the County, our partners and our customers.
<b>PS2</b>	<b>Reductions in Preventable Death, Injury and Property Loss</b>	
<b>PS2-1</b>	Reduce response time	Improve Forensic Evidence Recovery Team (FERT) response time.
		Identify new drugs of abuse and chemicals in the community that present potential public health problems that may result in death.
<b>GG2</b>	<b>Excellent, engaged and resilient workforce</b>	
<b>GG2-1</b>	Attract and hire new talent	Support and maintain competitive employee compensation and benefit packages.
		Train qualified pathologists (4) annually in the ACGME-accredited Forensic Pathology Fellowship program. This program provides service delivery to the department and is a consistent, reliable source of quality medical examiners.
<b>GG2-2</b>	Promote employee development and leadership	Support and maintain required professional certification for histology technician, toxicologists, forensic photographers and medicolegal death investigators.
		Renew accreditation with Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education.
		Acquire necessary staffing to ensure that current HR/administration and procurement personnel functionally align with new roles and responsibilities created by Integrated Financial Resource Management System (INFORMS) Project.
		Train qualified dentists through the contractual services of the department's forensic odontologist.
<b>GG3</b>	<b>Optimal Internal Miami-Dade County operations and service delivery</b>	
<b>GG3-2</b>	Ensure security of systems and data	Purchase specialized advanced analytical instrumentation to identify and measure newly emerging drugs of abuse and toxins.
		Maintain and facilitate coordination of unidentified decedents and missing persons; and review and process the County's unidentified decedents through the Federal DNA initiative (NCIC and NamUs.org).
		Convert to paperless department with secure and efficient archiving solutions.
		Improve internal chain of custody tracking systems.
		Develop and implement IT solutions to streamline business operations and improve our service to the County, our partners and our customers.
<b>GG3-4</b>	Effectively utilize and maintain facilities and assets	Replace aging audio-visual system in auditorium to ensure that our revenue-generating seminars continue to meet the highest of educational and training standards.
		Plan, cost estimate, integrate and execute complex cross-departmental (ITD, ISD, ME) projects such as the operations building electrical panel increase, and toxicology lab infrastructure upgrades.
<b>GG4</b>	<b>Effective Leadership and Management practices</b>	
<b>GG4-2</b>	Effectively allocate and utilize resources to meet current and future operating and capital needs	Amplify existing capacity for the department-wide network storage areas and backup strategies.





## Departmental Business Plan and Outlook

Department Name: **Medical Examiner**

FY2021-22 & FY2022-23

### KEY ISSUES

1. Critical to the Department's mission is to obtain sufficient operational and capital funding in order to:
  - a. Meet our statutory obligations to the residents of Miami-Dade County, law enforcement, the judiciary, the state of Florida, private industry and the medical and legal communities.
  - b. Attract and retain quality employees.
  - c. Meet and maintain National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME), Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI) and American Board of Forensic Toxicology (ABFT) accreditation and certification standards.
  - d. Remain current with laboratory and investigative technology in order to address continuous, emerging investigative challenges.
  - e. Provide in-house and off-site training and educational opportunities for departmental staff to meet emerging investigative challenges.
  - f. Maintain and update information technology hardware and software to include connectivity and compatibility with the County network infrastructure.
  - g. Recapitalize equipment that has exceeded its natural life span.







## Departmental Business Plan and Outlook

Department Name: **Medical Examiner**

FY2021-22 & FY2022-23

### PRIORITY INITIATIVES

1. Maintain accreditation and certification by NAME, ACGME, ABMDI, and ABFT.
2. Pursue replacement of existing case management and laboratory information software that will reach end of life after October 14, 2025 and no longer vendor supported.
3. Pursue staffing realignment and restore an Administrative Services Division Director to address labor concerns and improve administrative and fiscal effectiveness.
4. Replace the mini-lab and scanner and DVD  $\pm$ /CD-R duplicator (essential to maintain certification standards and day to day operations) due to the expiration of manufacturer support in 2021.
5. Replace decomposed wooden cooler shelves with a more sturdier rack system constructed with resilient materials that will ensure the safety of our employees while working in the cooler.
6. Continue to align staffing allocations with observed work demands and County financial streamline initiatives in order to better meet departmental objectives.
7. Collaborate with the Internal Services Department to integrate and execute complex multi-departmental projects such as toxicology lab infrastructure upgrades, the induction of new and more efficient laboratory systems and major renovations.
8. Collaborate with the Internal Services Department to repair and/or replace deteriorating and/or obsolete aspects of our 34-year old Medical Examiner facility.
9. Engage our workforce in business plan implementation.





## **FUTURE OUTLOOK**

The top priority of the department is to maintain personnel and operating funding sources to the proper service levels. As the state Medical Examiner Commission mandates, the department will complete the review and processing of all County unidentified decedents through the Federal DNA Initiative and maintain current data in the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System ([www.NamUs.org](http://www.NamUs.org)). Disaster and mass casualty preparedness will be a continuing challenge as we restore and train staff while moving forward with integrating data management software through Florida Emergency Mortuary Operations Response System (FEMORS). As time and our limited budget permits, the department desires to accomplish the following in the next three to five years:

- a. Renew and maintain accreditation and certification by NAME, ACGME, ABMDI, and ABFT.
- b. Increase administrative and operational staff to effectively manage the increased workload brought on by external factors (increased volume of residents and visitors).
- c. Continue a multi-year plan to convert all existing Medical Examiner case files into a state certified, digital database.
- d. Modernize the toxicology laboratory to include an increase in electric panel power capacity and advanced uninterrupted power supply systems to ensure the fleet of toxicology instrumentation has sufficient and consistent power for operation.
- e. Develop long-term, sustainable solution to ensure the current enterprise IT Coroner/Medical Examiner Data System is fully compatible with the INFORMS project and that it provides tailored, dependable support to operations amidst changing trends in IT security and interoperability.
- f. Continue to develop and implement IT solutions to streamline business operations and improve our service to the County, our partners, and our customers.
- g. Renovate the toxicology, histology, and morgue suites to better align with service demands, instrument workflow and hazardous material storage requirements.
- h. Modernize and beautify the ME facility. The facility is 34 years old and a majority of its décor (carpet, flooring, furniture, wall covering etc.) has not been replaced in nearly two decades.

## **ATTACHMENT 1**

### **BUSINESS PLAN REPORT**



